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# Wine, tourism and experience in the Canary Islands' context

## Abstract

*The Canary Islands or 'fortunate islands,' a Spanish archipelago and a well-known mass tourism destination, is experiencing the redevelopment of its wine industry. In this regard, wine tourism appears to be a natural extension emerging from a traditional product - wine - that has been part of Canary Islands' culture for centuries. This study explores the extent to which wine, tourism and related experiences are becoming integrated in local wineries' business/marketing concept. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 23 local small Canary Island winery operators. The findings demonstrate that wine tourism is starting to play an important role for wineries, facilitating the relationship between the wine product, the existing tourism and the education of consumers. However, high costs of production, the effects of cheaper wine imports and very limited interaction between wineries, the local hotel industry and the large numbers of tourists are some of the challenges growers are facing to further develop wine tourism. As many destinations strive to attract tourist dollars, the diversification of mass-tourism by means of a traditional product, with great emphasis on culture, experience and education provide the ingredients for successfully developing a niche market.*

## Keywords:

*wine; wineries; tourism; wine tourism; tradition; culture; Canary Islands*

## Introduction

The Canary Island, a Spanish province in the Atlantic Ocean, is a globally established mass tourism destination patronised by low-budget holidaymakers in search for sun and beach vacations. Such market position is not sustainable over the long run and there is clearly a need for the islands to diversify their tourism product base as a first step towards destination rejuvenation. To this end, one of the possible strategic options is to turn towards alternative tourism development concepts, such as traditional local products/themes, through which the visitor experience can be enhanced and the current mass-tourism destination image alleviated and enriched. To a certain extent,

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some of these alternative tourism development concepts are slowly becoming a reality. In fact, in recent years Spain's tourism industry has been experiencing a much needed transition from its traditional sun and beach image and its concentration in coastal areas, as a consequence of policy shifts during the 1990s resulting in diversification on the tourism supply side (Ivars Baidal, 2004, p. 315).

As with much of the Spanish mainland, tourism has been a fundamental instrument for the Canary Islands' economy (Bianchi, 2004; Espino-Rodríguez, & Padrón-Robaina, 2004; Papatheodorou, 2004; Moreno Gil, 2003) for many decades. Yearly, around ten million people visit this ultra-peripheral Spanish autonomous province, with a high 5:1 ratio between visitors and local residents, as compared to the islands' population of 2.03 million (Canary Institute of Statistics, 2007a, 2007b). Arguably, such high number of tourists exerts great pressures on the islands' natural resources (Garín-Muñoz, 2006). For example, imported energy supply and scarcity of rainwater are some issues illustrating the vulnerability of the islands on the environmental front (Calero, & Carta, 2004).

While there is clearly an argument against mass tourism and its effects, alternative and, to a great extent environmentally friendlier tourism concepts and themes based on the islands' countryside have been developed. For decades, a number of national parks and reserves (Garín-Muñoz, 2006) have offered tourists an escape from and an alternative to sun and beach. However, more recently the Canary Islands have been experiencing a restructuring of their destination image, with new products being created (Ivars Baidal, 2004).

Growing supply of rural based experiences far from tourist centres not only illustrates the need to diversify, but also the commercial potential that such initiatives may have in attracting different market segments. This process has also been long overdue. Nevertheless, the slow shift from mass-tourism to more natural experiences via direct contact with rural areas, their products and people is emerging. For instance, agrotourism offers visitors a peaceful, rural setting in direct contact with nature, and features shared or independent accommodation at farmers' homes, in some cases involving their whole family (Parra López, & Calero García, 2006). Agrotourism implies "a positive attitude towards other worlds, towards the environment and towards local people and their culture" (Parra López, & Calero García, 2006, p. 86), a far cry from what the bulk of tourists experience during their visit and stay in often heavily populated tourist resorts.

An additional offering in rural areas is that of rural tourism, a broader concept in comparison to agrotourism, but similar in that it is based on nature, tranquillity and familiarisation with local customs (Reguero Oxinalde, 1994, in Parra López, & Calero García, 2006). Clearly, neither agrotourism nor rural tourism can compete with the current contribution of mass-tourism, especially in generating revenues and as an employment provider for local labour. What is important, however, is the progressive realisation that the ability to develop alternative tourism initiatives could assist in the

preservation of natural landscapes, the cultural heritage of rural areas, and traditional agricultural products (Parra López, & Calero García, 2006, p. 86). This process has been initiated in other parts of Spain, where public policies and growing consumer demand have contributed to the birth of alternative forms of tourism, including nature, urban, rural and cultural (Ivars Baidal, 2004).

Alongside these events, in recent years the re-birth and re-development of the islands' ancient wine industry is providing yet another avenue for diversification of existing rural products available to both locals and the large number of visitors. The natural progression of grape growing from being a purely rural activity to becoming a link between wine and tourism is a resource being tapped into among many local wineries as a selling strategy and a leisure activity.

### **Wine tourism: An alternative leisure activity for the Canaries?**

For centuries, the Canary Islands' wine industry has been a very important part of the islands' economy, culture, as well as a critical element in the archipelago's culinary heritage. While not fully developed yet, the archipelago's wine industry has a number of characteristics that suggest the potential for the successful growth of wine tourism, a concept involving visitation to wineries and cellar doors (Hall, Sharples, Cambourne, Macionis, Mitchell, & Johnson, 2000; Cambourne, 1998).

Wine tourism is relatively a new concept that has emerged about two decades ago in many of the world's wine regions and has, since then, experienced impressive growth (Tassiopoulos, Nuntsu, & Haydam, 2004; Charters, & Ali-Knight, 2002; Mitchell, & Hall, 2001; Tzimitra-Kalogianni, Papadaki-Klavdianou, Alexaki, & Tsakiridou, 1999; Szivas, 1999). Over the same period, the body of research pertaining to wine tourism has grown, steadily focusing almost equally on demand as well as the supply side. In terms of demand, Getz and Brown (2006a) pointed out to the individualistic nature of wine tourists who primarily look for easy access to wineries, while avoiding a mass tourism experience and, therefore, are likely to shun away from the large groups on bus tours. Investigating the factors that make the wine region appealing to visitors, Getz and Brown (2006a) developed a model of wine destination attractiveness that consists of three main overlapping features:

- Core wine product, mainly composed of service attributes, visitors' welcoming, staff's knowledge.
- Core destination appeal, with wineries' physical surroundings and wineries' environment as the key components.
- The cultural product, emphasizing the 'locality' of the region, particularly in its gastronomy.

In the supply side of research, the main focus of the inquiry were wineries as family owned small and medium size enterprises and their willingness to invest in the tourism side of their business (Getz, & Brown, 2006b; also see Getz, & Carlsen, 2000).

Consequently, the validity of life-cycle frameworks and their applicability to wine tourism (also see, for instance Dodd, & Beverland, 2001) has been questioned (Getz, & Brown, 2006a). However, the elements provided above led Getz and Brown (2006a) to underline the importance of networks in facilitating the wine experience through the involvement of recreational and cultural suppliers, destination marketing/management organizations, and the wine and tourism industries. Wargenau and Che (2006) also investigated business networks of wineries and have found that alliances between Michigan wineries and local businesses are currently vital in newly developed wine trails. In comparison, Tomljenović (2006) studied the initial stages of wine tourism development in a comparative study of Croatian wine regions, and identified the critical importance of offering alternative rural attractions with a local appeal. Carlsen (2004) also recognizes such offering as critical because without these complementary activities winery visitors may not travel to rural areas only to visit wineries.

Furthermore, Getz and Tomljenović (in press) compared Canadian and Croatian wineries, and in the process investigated their involvement with wine tourism. These authors' explained that on the Canadian side wine tourism appears to be moving towards rapid development; however, the constant growth in the number of local players (wineries) may pose future constraints. At the other end, Croatian wineries, with a much longer historical background are just beginning to appreciate and maximise potential opportunities for the development of wine tourism. A similar development is identified in preliminary wine tourism studies in Hungary, where Szivas (1999) concludes that first steps towards the development of wine tourism have been made.

While some New World wine regions have tapped into wine tourism as a strategy to market themselves, their community, or even their nation, the relatively new nature of the industry has in some cases posed challenges. For example, current fast development in some of these New World wine regions may lead to potential uncontrollable growth (Beer, & Lewis, 2006; Griffith, 2007), a situation that could limit or hamper wineries' efforts of achieving a long-term sustainable wine tourism concept. Getz and Brown (2006b) criticize such situations, pointing out that "There is no evidence available to suggest that wineries always grow bigger, that acreage planted in grapes will continue to expand, or that any other measure of growth should be the norm" (p. 93). In the Old World wine regions, on the other hand, there appears to be a more cautious, even passive stance towards wine tourism despite a strong, century-old wine tradition and a more established wine industry.

Similar to the case of Croatia's wine industry in regards to history, tradition and heritage, the Canary Islands' wine product goes as far back as several centuries (the 17th), although in-between the industry declined dramatically to almost a point of no return (García-Fernández, 1999). In recent years, as in many other Spanish wine regions, the establishment of Designations of Origin (DO) (Martínez-Carrasco, Brugarolas, & Martínez-Poveda, 2005) has given much needed support to the wine industry in the archipelago, particularly in encouraging quality improvements through stricter

controls and, to a certain extent, protection of local labels and creation of a recognised wine identity.

Not surprisingly, recently Canary wines have gained international recognition (Challenge International du Vin, 2008; Latest News, 2008; Tenerife News, 2005), underlining the opportunities that await local wineries if such promising developments become a consistent feature through quality and marketing improvements. Despite so much potential, however, the archipelago is far from being the 'typical' wine-growing region, especially because, according to Darias-Martín (2007), it is the only region in the world where wine grapes are grown at 28° north latitude (p. 871). Also, many vineyards are located in urban areas, with currently strong pressures for growers to succumb to the temptation of selling their property to real estate developers. In addition, while the soil in the islands is largely volcanic and rain fall is low in many areas, there is a mix of several climates, as in the island of Tenerife (Aguilera-Klink, Pérez-Moriana, & Sánchez-García, 2000). These climates provide appropriate conditions for the growth of 33 different grape varieties, 19 of which are white and 14 red (Darias-Martín, 2007), including listán blanco, Marmajuelo, Gual, Malvasía (white varieties), and Listán negro, negramoll, tintilla and castellana (red varieties) (La Reserva, 2006).

In some Spanish wine regions, wine tourism is centred in the design of wine trails as an experiential product (Díaz Armas, 2008). Recently, a new wine trail, or 'Ruta del Vino', opened in the Tacoronte-Acentejo wine region on the island of Tenerife (Ruta del Vino, 2008). This 2008 opening resulted from a collaborative effort among eight local wineries, five restaurants, five accommodation operations and six other businesses that include a farmer's market, a museum and a handicraft shop (Ruta del Vino, 2008). The new wine trail is now certified in the Wine Trails of Spain group, the only distinction of such calibre in the Canary Islands, an accolade that only eight other wine regions have achieved in the rest of Spain to date (Ruta del Vino, 2008). On La Palma Island, a local development organisation invested some 13,000 Euros to finance the establishment of five wine and tourism routes with the main objective of promoting and marketing the island's wines (La Opinión, 2008). A more ambitious plan is also underway on this same island for local wineries to gain certification in the Wine Trails of Spain, a status that to date only the Tacoronte-Acentejo region in Tenerife enjoys (La Opinión, 2008). In tune with the recent trend of wine trail establishments, in August 2008 the island of Gran Canaria also inaugurated its own wine trail (Soitu.es-EFE, 2008).

The increasing interest in wine trail development, coupled with the wine industry's revival and wineries' growing involvement with wine tourism are all indications of the momentum that is currently building around the wine product. In turn, these elements suggest the potential to further develop into a sustainable tourism concept. In this context, the purpose of this study was to answer the following fundamental questions: a) to what extent, if any, is tourism part of wineries' business strategy and b) what challenges, if any, are wineries facing in this developmental process? Answers to these questions are sought from the perspective of one of the key stakeholders in the wine-tourism relationship - Canary Island grape growers.

## Methodology

In the month of May 2007, 61 wineries, 45 of which are located on the island of Tenerife, and the total number of wineries of La Palma (16) that have adhered to the local Regulatory Council of Denomination of Origin (DO) were identified in database searches ([www.tacovin.com](http://www.tacovin.com), [www.malvasiadelapalma.com/bodegas.php?secc=39](http://www.malvasiadelapalma.com/bodegas.php?secc=39)). Being the first region to be awarded DO status in the archipelago, added to its high concentration of vineyards and wineries within a 20 kilometre radius were critical reasons for choosing wineries from the Tacoronte-Acentejo region in Tenerife. In the case of La Palma, the island's newly developed wine trail at the time of the study, added to the personal knowledge of one of the researchers were strong reasons for choosing this island's wineries.

Prior to travelling to the islands, all businesses were contacted via letters translated into Spanish. The letters explained the objectives of the study and invited all recipients to participate via face-to-face interviews to be conducted at a later stage. Upon arrival in the archipelago, one of the researchers established telephone contact with these businesses. This effort resulted in 15 (33.3%) wineries from Tenerife, and 8 (50%) from La Palma accepting the invitation to participate, a total of 23, an overall 37.7% response rate. Information from the autonomous Canary Island government office indicated the existence of some 200 mostly small/family wineries in the archipelago at the time the study was conducted (2007). The limited number of participating operations is therefore acknowledged as a limitation that may not allow for making generalisations of the Canary Islands' wine and wine tourism industries.

All face-to-face interviews were conducted during the month of June 2007 and on respondents' own terms; the interviews lasted an average of 37 minutes. Measures were undertaken to ensure that winery operators had no imminent obligations at the vineyard on the day and time of the interview. The data collected from the interviews were transcribed and translated from Spanish into English, and managed using the software NVivo.

## Results and discussion

Table 1 shows that 17 (73.9%) wineries had been operating for ten or more years, but no longer than 15 years, or since 1992 when designations of origin (DO) were established in some of the regions explored. In 15 cases (65.2%) families run the wineries themselves, demonstrating the small size nature of the archipelago's wineries. A total of 17 (73.9%) operations offered formal wine tastings, that is, in the form of a cellar door or a tasting room, 14 (60.8%) were equipped to host groups of visitors, and four (17.4%) had a restaurant attached to the winery, suggesting operators' clear intention to be involved with wine tourism in the form of catering for visitors and passers-by.

Observations made at most wineries illustrate critical changes after wineries' adherence to Designation of Origin (DO), particularly in the introduction of modern equipment that denote more professionalism, efficiency, and an intention to work on quality. In turn, all these elements suggest the potential for successful winery entrepreneurship and the further development of wine tourism.

Table 1

**A PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPATING WINERIES**

Years under DO	Family owned	Offers cellar doors / tastings	Restaurant on site	Hosts visitors (tours)
15	1	1		1
15	1	1	1	1
12	1	1	1	1
10	1	1	1	1
10	1	1		1
15	1	1		1
15	1	1		1
n/a	1	1		1
n/a	1	1		1 **
15		1		1
15	1	1 *		
15		1		1
15		1		
12	1	1 *		1 **
12	1	1 *		
12		1		1
12	1	1 *		
12		1		1 **
10		1		
9	1	1		
8	1	1 *		
8		1		1
8		1 *		

\* 'Informal' provision of cellar door; tastings available but no tasting room.

\*\* Receives visitors only occasionally; only upon request, or on appointment.

At the same time, a strong historical, cultural and traditional background are supporting elements for the wineries in the areas, and these aspects are also reflected in the comments of three participants whose wineries are open to the public:

*We are a family business composed of five people. We created our own history, my wife and my three sons. We started as one of the first wineries to adhere to the designation of origin; we became attracted by this project.*

*The main reason for being in this industry is to make a living; we also have a long family tradition, are recognized locally because we have been in this business for quite long.*

*The main reason for having this winery was tradition. Obviously, we had the land planted with vines, and the sweat and work of our grandfather was such that we did not want to give this up.*

From a business perspective, preservation of tradition can be a heavy burden, particularly in such a highly competitive industry as wine growing. Thus passion, business savvy, marketing, and wine making knowledge are critical in running a winery. However, these elements are lacking in some cases, as the comments of another respondent

demonstrate: *“There are very few fully professional wineries, where the managers are oenologists, or understand about wines, while the majority is composed of hobby growers that grow grapes as an additional income source ...”*

#### WINERIES' INVOLVEMENT WITH WINE TOURISM

While the potential for being involved in tourism and tapping into new commercial opportunities clearly exists, some wineries that are still trying to find their way in their industry are rather cautious, avoiding the risk of becoming distracted and over commercialized. Instead, these operations' primary business philosophy is to focus on uniqueness and differentiation:

*... we do not have brochures advertising our winery as other wineries might do; we have a different winery concept.*

*We are not trying to compete with other wineries; every winery is different and we value such diversity. In our case we want to focus on informing people so they can increase their knowledge about our wines.*

*Our philosophy is to position our wines, which by the way may be of similar quality as outside wines, not better or worse than those wines from outside but different.*

These varying ways of interpreting the needs of the winery, its visitors, and in perceiving the importance of tourism have a direct impact on many operators' business vision, which in turn have implications for wineries' stakeholders: the wine industry, wine consumers and the local community. Furthermore, the focus on wine quality opens the door for exports, while at the same time minimises the dependency on tourism and further contributes to emphasising the importance of distinctiveness, an aspect that may be appreciated among different visitor segments:

*I do not see our winery becoming a circus where bus loads of people visit our winery everyday. This is not the idea here and to do this there are other wineries that are nicer looking and have a better location than ours, with nice views. These wineries can offer the visitor a 'physical' attractive [the building], but I do not see this type of tourism for our winery. Tourists come to our winery attracted by our wines and not by the physical attractiveness of our winery.*

The tasting room is also referred to as a potential venue for introducing the wine product to consumers on a small scale, further suggesting an intention among wine growers to be involved with wine tourism:

*We have a tasting room, although it is not open all the time, but we do offer tastings to small groups of people who visit us.*

*We had a small space for tastings (private, family oriented) but now we have an 'official' one.*



*We plan to become involved in the form of selling food (restaurant); however, we are still in the planning process. We have just been accepted in the newly created wine trail two months ago.*

*We also host university students, have open door days and also have small buses bringing tours... Now that we will soon have our website up and running, it will be possible to book winery visits online. We provide them [visitors] with nibbles, show them around, and try to do so in groups because we also need to do our own work.*

While the focus in some cases is to keep the operation's concept simple, equally critical is to consider all customer segments as potential consumers of wine tourism experiences: "we do [plan on receiving more visitors]... not only tourists but also the locals." Such an approach serves two major purposes. Firstly, avoiding that wine tourism gains an image of over-commercialization, as it is to a great extent the case of beaches. In fact, over-commercialization may not fit with expectations and goals of consumer groups that prefer simplicity or those who may be searching for a unique experience at a Canary winery. Secondly, it helps preserving and reinforcing cultural and traditional food and wine components among local visitors, simplifying the delivery and highlighting the educational component of the wine tourism product.

The potential for future development of wine tourism is also reflected in comments that underline a sustainable and long-term approach, whereby wine tourism, local traditions, heritage, culture and education can play a critical role:

*Tastings could be combined with local foods, and tourists could easily learn, take a one-day tasting course and take a sort of certificate they could take with them when they leave. However, there must be a direct interaction, not translated and not audiovisual ... right now the wine tourism infrastructure is not there. Tour operators also want the very best quality but are not willing to pay accordingly. One of the wineries is getting organised, with restaurant and tastings, and is also showing traditional Canary sports ('Lucha Canaria,' or Canary wrestling).*

At least two of the participating wineries in the Tacoronte-Acentejo region actively promote educational activities, one featuring events that bring together wine and local foods. The other winery promotes events that blend poetry and wines, coffee and wine, or during the harvesting season, allows children and adults to pick and stomp grapes. The implementation of such ideas revolving around the wine tourism concept and that bring together leisure, wine, culture and tradition provides more alternatives to tourists and locals. The inclusion of experiences that combine food, wine and folklore could serve in the long-term to change the islands' perennial image of being a destination for the sun and beach hungry.

## MARKETING POTENTIAL AND EXISTING BARRIERS TO FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Today, marketing Canary Islands' wines at tourist resorts continues to be a difficult process, particularly as prepaid travel packages may discourage outside tourists from spending an additional six to ten Euros for a bottle of local wines. Despite this difficulty, some operators are looking at long term involvement with the local tourism and hospitality industries: *"We want to sell our wines in hospitality related businesses, as well as to people visiting our winery."* Such direct marketing strategies are helping a second operation to increase commercial gains, avoiding middlemen or distributors in the process: *"Today we sell more to 'particulars' or private consumers than to restaurants and supermarkets."*

However, potential opportunities the tourism industry may offer are for some operators still a long way to be materialized: *"At the moment we are focusing on the local market and also attend wine events outside the islands and sometimes win prices."* In other cases, winery operators' business strategy does not necessarily include a relationship with tourism: *"We don't have any advertising because we have a different philosophy; word of mouth advertising is what we are really interested in."*

Issues such as anti-drink-drive legislation and luggage restrictions on flights that limit the transport of Canary Island wines amount tourists departing the islands contribute to local wineries' vulnerability in a very competitive industry. At the same time, cultural aspects well engrained among the local population further add to the severity of current challenges:

*We are trying to have people take the rest of the bottles they open at restaurants in specially designed bags and bottle caps. However, it is not in our culture to take the 'rests' of meals, etc. back home; we are shameful of that.*

Another grape grower saw a different constraint in that *"We have less demand but more production"*. The advantage for this grower of selling *"our wines to people who visit our winery and also at a premium at this bar"* contributes to minimising challenges that other wineries lacking hospitality facilities such as a bar or restaurant may face. Another respondent complained that *"Our sector lacks in professionalism and that is the main reason why the sector is not moving forward"*. Other serious impediments, including the geographic environment where grapes are grown are additionally affecting the further development of wine entrepreneurship and wine tourism:

*The terrain is very hilly and most of the work is done by hand. ... the other day I visited a winery on the [Spanish] mainland that produces 25 million kilograms of grapes, a quantity that not even all [Canary] islands together can produce... well, you see how those wineries are organised, how large they are, have 4 oenologists, highly mechanised with little labour... well, they can produce cheaply. We do have a different [wine] product, we are different, but we are not better.*

*Our production costs are higher than elsewhere and if we were to produce the same varieties... well, we would have no chance to compete... . . . Right now we have an oversupply of wine, and our wines are 'young'; they need to be sold quickly. You need to be very efficient in marketing your wine. The few professional wine producers can get around these challenges but the majority that are not so skilful are struggling.*

*Many growers are still using very traditional methods, much more laborious; hand labour is complicated and expensive, with approximately three times more costs than in other agricultural activities.*

High costs and uncertainty about reaping benefits among some grape growers means that the long-term preservation of a local tradition and product that have survived for centuries may be at risk: *"We are now receiving offers for grape production from people who have slowly but surely stopped their involvement with grape growing ..."* To some extent, lack of local support for traditional products is also referred to as a cause for concern: *"We are a bit chauvinistic in the Canary Islands; we sometimes turn our backs on our own products. For example, in business circles people prefer to drink wines from mainland Spain instead of Canary Islands' wines"*. Moreover, the apparent broad acceptance for outside products is, according to another participant, an issue that may have long-term implications for the local wine industry: *"We are fighting to differentiate our wines and those from outside. They are fundamentally different, in elaboration as well as in flavour. But to make people value it is a constant fight against much cheaper wines, while you don't get our wines for less than six Euros"*.

Selling wine among the millions of tourists travelling to the islands each year would provide a vital lifeline to the Canary Islands' wine industry. However, exploiting the great potential that tourism offers is still a long way ahead: *"...right now the wine tourism infrastructure is not there. Tour operators also want the very best quality but are not willing to pay accordingly"*. Despite these deficiencies for two different participants the links between local hospitality, local wine industry and tourism are very strong:

*While our business does not directly depend on tourism, restaurants and other establishments we sell our wines to do depend on tourism.*

*... tourism is Canary Islands' main income source, and we do depend on tourism. If people who work in hotels, etc. are unemployed, they will be less likely to spend in our wines.*

## **Conclusions and implications**

Because of newly established designations of origin, as well as wine trails, the Canary Islands' wine industry is in many respects experiencing a rebirth based on set quality standards and the emphasis on the region's geographic and climatic attributes and grape varieties. The great influence and economic significance of mass tourism for the Canary Islands provides a number of commercial opportunities for the archipelago's wineries to tap into, offering an original, traditional and more natural alternative to mass tourism in the form of wine tourism. At the same time, local dishes prepared with local rural products, as well as other rural activities that include agro- and rural

tourism and arts and crafts are tools that could sell the islands' heritage, culture and traditions to visitors interested in local experiences that differ from the usual sun and beach leisure.

The development of the wine tourism concept in the islands is just unfolding and may have several important implications for local winery operators and spillovers into other industries in years to come. For instance, Canary wines' newly gained international recognition contributes to raising the profile of the local wine industry, wine tourism, and creates awareness about lesser known but very valuable aspects of the islands' cultural heritage. Moreover, the possibility of offering wine tours could contribute to showcasing the islands' gastronomy. Combining the winery experience with local sports and traditions, or even introducing activities that educate different age groups about wine growing processes can help educate consumers and tourists about unique aspects of the archipelago.

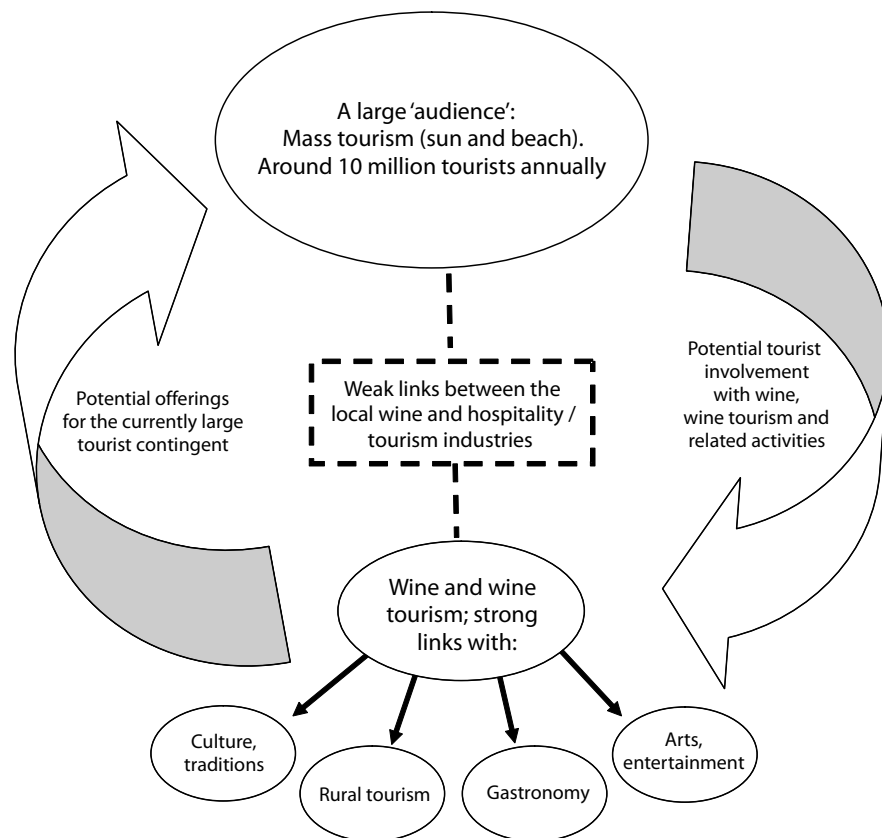
As competition to attract tourists to increasingly distant and/or sophisticated destinations becomes much stronger, there is a clear need for some destinations to offer more than just basic attributes such as sunny beaches. In the case of the Canary Islands, with its ultra-peripheral European region status, geographic isolation and heavy reliance on tourism revenues, there is a unique opportunity to use the wine, gastronomic and other rural experience based elements. Furthermore, the importance of attracting visitor groups that greatly value experiences in natural environments, with wine and food enjoyment in combination with cultural experiences, arts, crafts, and education about these same aspects could open the door for the establishment of niche markets that today are either very limited or inexistent.

In turn, providing experiences that, like wine tourism are also based on heritage and tradition may assist smaller rural operations in their long-term (commercial) efforts. Moreover, providing a local produce and the rural experience these operations not only could benefit from tourism revenues, but also slow down the process of urbanisation and rural decline. Figure 1 illustrates the current potential for the wine product to be a catalyst of tourism offerings and diversification. In contrast to other studies conducted in developing wine tourism regions (see, for example, Getz, & Brown, 2006a, 2006b; Getz, & Tomljenović, in print), a strong connection between the Canary Islands' wineries and the local tourism and hospitality industries appears to be missing. Such gap in collaboration represents a critical challenge and is also depicted in Figure 1. While the offerings of local products proposed represent an alternative to the current (sun and beach) mass tourism concept the archipelago has been known for decades, the wine, hospitality and tourism industries need to come closer to create much needed synergies that without a doubt could benefit all stakeholders.

In view of recent developments of Canary Islands' wine trail development, future research could extend the findings of this study to other islands, or to a larger number of wineries and provide more updated insights of the current state of the archipelago's

wine and wine tourism industries. Studies could also explore whether different islands are following different initiatives in developing their wine and wine tourism industries. Information on these dimensions could help assess the level of consistency, as well as determine whether some islands are being more successful than others in the strategies they implement. Research could also be conducted among tourists to investigate the extent to which they demand local products and offerings. With clear evidence that some segments among the millions of visitors are interested in such products and offerings, the pressure would be on local authorities and the wine, hospitality and tourism industries to work together towards the common goal of enhancing visitors' experience. Future research could also be conducted on winery visitors' experience, a dimension that could also provide winery operators with critical information to support their efforts in marketing their wines and facilities. Another area that merits further attention regards the extent to which winery operators may be benefiting from tourism, as well as whether wineries are being successful in marketing their wines to outside visitors. If tourism and tourists do not result in tangible benefits for local wineries, involvement in these areas needs to be revisited or reconsidered.

Figure 1  
**CANARY ISLANDS' WINE AND WINE TOURISM - OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**



With the millions of visitors the Canary archipelago receives each year, a fundamental step for local tourism stakeholders to achieve further development, and less reliance on cheap package tours is to diversify current tourist offerings. Doing so may contribute to progressively change the current image of the Canary Islands into one of unique rural experiences. In this regard, the local wine industry can play a fundamental role, providing a quality product with centuries of tradition, while connecting wine with other local offerings that can provide visitors with long lasting positive memories.

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